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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 KARACHI 000145

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: BALOCHISTAN - WHAT MAY BE BEHIND THE CURRENT
UNREST AND POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR USG SHIPMENTS

REF: A. KARACHI 131
[1](#)B. KARACHI 111
[1](#)C. KARACHI 73
[1](#)D. KARACHI 34
[1](#)E. 08 KARACHI 463
[1](#)F. 08 KARACHI 338
[1](#)G. 08 KARACHI 339

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY CONSUL GENERAL STEPHEN FAKAN FOR REASONS 1
.4 b and d.

Summary:

[1](#)1. (C) Often violent unrest over the killing of three Baloch leaders continued in Balochistan over the past week. Nationalist political parties led protest rallies and militant nationalist groups claimed credit for violence, including a rocket attack on a Frontier Corps (FC) camp. Some nationalist leaders rejected a GOP call for an internal investigation into the killings, calling instead for a UN inquiry. The protests and violence occurred throughout the Baloch areas of the province, even in normally calm coastal districts. Baloch National Party) Mengal (BNP-M) and National Party (NP) leaders refused to participate in a peace meeting called by Chief Minister, Mohammad Aslam Khan Raisani on April 19. BNP-M announced plans for a "Long March" across the province and appears to be attempting to rise to the forefront of the protest movement. USG supply shipments, which cross Mengal-dominated Khudzar district, have been vulnerable to temporary disruptions caused by civil unrest in the province.

[1](#)2. (C) In Pakistan,s Senate, Minister of Interior Rehman Malik made controversial claims that India, Afghanistan and Russia were backing the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) to fuel an insurgency in the province. Many in the province see the killing of these three Baloch leaders as a turning point in Balochistan,s relationship with the federal government, and the continuing violence is pushing Baloch nationalists further away from reconciliation. Many Baloch had high expectations from President Zardari; however, these events have frustrated these hopes.

A Violent Week

[1](#)3. (C) During the past week, unrest continued throughout Balochistan over the April 9 murder of Baloch National

Movement (BNM) General Secretary Ghulam Mohammad Baloch and two other Baloch nationalists (ref A) in broad daylight. The three were meeting with their attorney, Katchkol Ali Advocate, when they were pulled out of his office in the middle of Quetta and killed. Most observers believe that the intelligence services (probably Military Intelligence) were responsible. This marked a dramatic and negative departure from the Pakistan People,s Party outreach effort toward the Balochis.

¶4. (C) Following the murders, there were numerous reported instances of bomb blasts and hand grenade attacks. In one April 14 action, the militant Baloch Republican Army (BRA) claimed responsibility for rocket attacks on Frontier Corps (FC) camps in restive Dera Bugti district that injured three FC members. In another, unknown attackers fired rockets at a police training center in Quetta.

¶5. (C) Protestors in the province closed several businesses, including banks and burned a number of government and private offices. Protestors were turned back by police teargas in at least one instance and the headless bodies of two allegedly pro-GOP Bugti tribesmen were found in Nasirabad district on April 16. Three more dead Bugti tribesmen were found on April 18 in Dera Bugti. No one has claimed responsibility for the killings in either instance. Many cities across the province observed strikes and transportation halts.

Tepid Nationalist Response to GOP Offer

KARACHI 00000145 002 OF 005

¶6. (C) Federal Interior Minister Rehman Malik visited Quetta on April 14 and promised the GOP would form a commission to investigate the killings of the three Baloch nationalists. The commission will consist of senior officers from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the Frontier Corps (FC), intelligence agency representatives and Members of the Balochistan Provincial Assembly.

¶7. (C) In the past, the Baloch have typically distrusted the federal government in general and the intelligence agencies in particular. Many prominent political parties and nationalists, including most recently Baloch National Party) Mengal (BNP-M) General Secretary Habib Jalib, have rejected the GOP offer and called for a UN investigation in lieu of a GOP inquiry.

¶8. (C) BMP-M President Aktar Mengal told the CG on April 21 that he believed GOP promises of additional resources rang hollow. He pointed out that prior governments, including the Musharraf and Sharif administrations had promised additional resource, which he claimed never materialized.

¶9. (SBU) On April 22, Malik addressed the Senate debate on Balochistan and claimed that India, Afghanistan and Russia were backing the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) to fuel an insurgency in the province. He also dismissed Balochistan Republican Army (BRA) chief Brahamdagh Bugti,s demand for an independent Balochistan, and claimed the "militant organization" was being backed by Afghanistan and India. Rehman also alleged that Brahamdagh was behind the kidnapping of Amcit John Solecki. He denied that a military operation was underway in Balochistan, and he promised an in-camera session of the Senate to discuss the details about the Balochistan situation. This was followed by an in-camera session in the Senate April 23, and much media criticism April 24 of Rehman,s allegations. (Comment: While the GOP frequently refers to Bugti as head of both the BRA and the BLA, Post has heard conflicting reports about BLA leadership since the 2007 death of BLA leader Mir Balach Marri. We will attempt to clarify this in future reporting. End comment.)

Widespread Support

¶10. (C) Perhaps what is singular about these protests is their duration and breadth. Rallies and violence have continued for well over a week in the province. A large number of districts have participated in the protests, which, in some cases, have drawn the support of the Pashtuns, traditional rivals of the Baloch. Southern districts in the Makran (coastal) region, such as Gwadar and Kech, usually less prone to turmoil, have been active in the protests and reportedly experienced violent events such as hand grenade attacks and arson.

Militant Baloch Groups Active in Protests

¶11. (C) Reportedly, many protestors openly displayed flags of the Baloch Republican Army (BRA), associated with Bugti tribal leader Brahamdagh Bugti, and the historically Marri-tribe affiliated Baloch Liberation Army (BLA). A source in Balochistan told Post that BLA militants warned school officials in the Makran against displaying Pakistani flags. Baloch nationalist leader Harbiyar Marri and BRA leader Bugti both called for U.S. and Indian support for the nationalist cause during separate televised interviews. Jailed Baloch Republican Party (BRP) officials initiated a hunger strike demanding political prisoner status. (Note: The BRP is reputedly the political wing of the BRA. End note.)

Baloch National Party) Mengal Joins In, Plans "Long March"

¶12. (C) Women members of the Baloch National Party) Mengal (BNP-M) demonstrated against the killings in the industrial city of Hub. BNP-M officials led demonstrations in Khuzdar and Lasbella districts. BNP-M President Aktar Mengal told the CG that his party plans to coordinate with other

KARACHI 00000145 003 OF 005

nationalists parties to stage a series of demonstrations beginning on April 30. He added that the party also plans to stage a "Long March" on that day, beginning in the coastal city of Omara in Gwadar District and ending in Quetta. (Note: The GOP derailed similar plans for a BNP-M "Long March" in 2006 by arresting the Mengal and a number of his followers. Mengal said that he is prepared to be interned again. End note.)

Chief Minister Announces "Peace Committee"

¶13. (C) On April 19, the province's Chief Minister, Mohammad Aslam Khan Raisani, a member of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), formed a "Peace Committee" to halt targeted killings of Punjabis and Pashtuns, among others. Parties participating in the meeting included the Pashtookhwas Milli Awami Party (PkMAP - a predominantly Pashtun political party), the Awami National Party (ANP), the Balochistan National Party Awami (BNP-A) and the Pakistan Muslim League) Nawaz (PML-N). BNP-M leaders and National Party (NP) leaders declined to participate, citing a lack of confidence in the provQD94'[90qQ|^apter in relations with Islamabad; however, the recent murders were an open affront to Balochis and have dashed most hopes for reconciliation.

¶16. (C) Militant Nationalists have repeatedly used stories of the defilement of Baloch women as a rallying call, including the claim that Pakistani soldiers raped a Baloch woman at Sui Gas fields in 2004 and a more recent claim that a Baloch woman is being used as a "sex slave" by the military. (Comment: Both claims remain unsubstantiated accusations. End comment.) Nationalists want, at the least, greater provincial autonomy and control over the province's natural resources. Over time, issues such as GOP military operations in Dera Bugti, alleged missing persons, and political prisoners have been added to their list of demands.

They are riled by the federal takeover of Gwadar port and want provincial control restored there.

¶17. (C) Nargis Baloch, a respected Baloch intellectual and editor of nationalist Urdu newspaper Intekhab, described the killings of the three Baloch leaders as a turning point for many Baloch. She explained to Poloff that she had watched many young Baloch nationalists grow increasingly disillusioned with the promises of the GOP and they were moving towards militancy. Many Baloch separatists, who are wanted by the GOP, hide in the mountains of Balochistan. In the past, Nargis said that they were looking for ways to come out of hiding and go back to their families and lives. As things have deteriorated in Balochistan, these same young nationalists see violence and independence as their only option.

KARACHI 00000145 004 OF 005

¶18. (C) According to Nargis, Baloch nationalists feel that they have been betrayed by the GOP and are clear they are willing to accept help from any country that offers it. Nargis was visibly upset by the turn of events in Balochistan. She stressed that the Baloch were natural allies against the Taliban, because the Baloch were not religious extremists and they did not give the Taliban safe havens.

Key Nationalist Militant Groups

¶19. (C) While nationalism has been a common Baloch cause, militant activity has generally been led by the Bugti, Marri and Mengal tribes. Currently, the Baloch Republican Army (BRA), directed by Brahamdagh Bugti from Kabul, is the Bugti tribe's leading insurgent group. The Bugti tribe is predominant in Dera Bugti district. The Marri tribe, traditionally based in Kohlu district, has been associated with the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF).

¶20. (C) The Mengal tribe, with a strong presence from Lasbella to Khuzdar district, has been relatively moderate during the current nationalist insurgency. The Mengals have been associated with militant groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Organization (BLO), the Baloch People's Liberation Front (BPLF), and more recently, Lashkar-e-Baloch (Note: The is also the name given to the BNP-M group that planned to participate in the aborted 2006 march across the province. End note.)

Impact of Civil Unrest in Balochistan on USG Supply Routes

¶21. (C) Internal turmoil in Balochistan is an ongoing threat to USG supply shipments to Afghanistan. On April 9, around 200 protestors blocked the Hub - Chaman road in the vicinity of the central Balochistan city of Khuzdar. Police were able to open the road the next day. Militants (presumably nationalists) bombed railroad tracks on April 11 and again on April 12. The damage was minor and the railway was repaired relatively quickly.

¶22. (C) In another unrelated but equally pertinent example of the effect of civil unrest on supply shipments, on March 25, Pashtun merchants blocked traffic on the Quetta-Chaman highway in the vicinity of the Kohzak Hills in Balochistan to reportedly protest the slow pace of construction work on the highway, which they claimed was preventing them from conducting business. Hundreds of vehicles, including around 35 - 40 U.S. military supply vehicles, were stalled en route due to the protest, which did not end until the next afternoon.

Comment

¶23. (C) Nationalist groups appear to view the recent killing of nationalist leaders (ref A) as an opportunity to gain momentum for their movement and also a turning point away from reconciliation. They appear to have lost faith in repeated provincial and GOP efforts to resolve the conflict (reftels). The recent events surrounding the kidnapping of UNHCR official John Solecki (ref G) appear to have enhanced IQJ6Q)'cAQ~Q7C=